

STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

The development of the Strategic Plan spans more than a year. The Plan is the foundation of a broader undertaking to develop a Budget and Performance Management System (BPMS) to integrate all aspects of budget and performance and associated costs and serve as a government model. BPMS will transform FSA into a more citizen-centered, performance-based, and results-oriented organization. Through the implementation of BPMS, FSA is systematically improving its business processes and performance. FSA's leadership is fully committed to using BPMS as the means for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the Agency. To accomplish this Agency-wide undertaking, FSA assembled a team of managers representing major functions within FSA, enlisted key advisors, and invited field employees to participate ensuring the BPMS concept was well formulated and accepted at all levels within the Agency (see Figure 4). The BPMS Core Team combined its collective Agency knowledge with the input from FSA's stakeholders, and created this Strategic Plan.

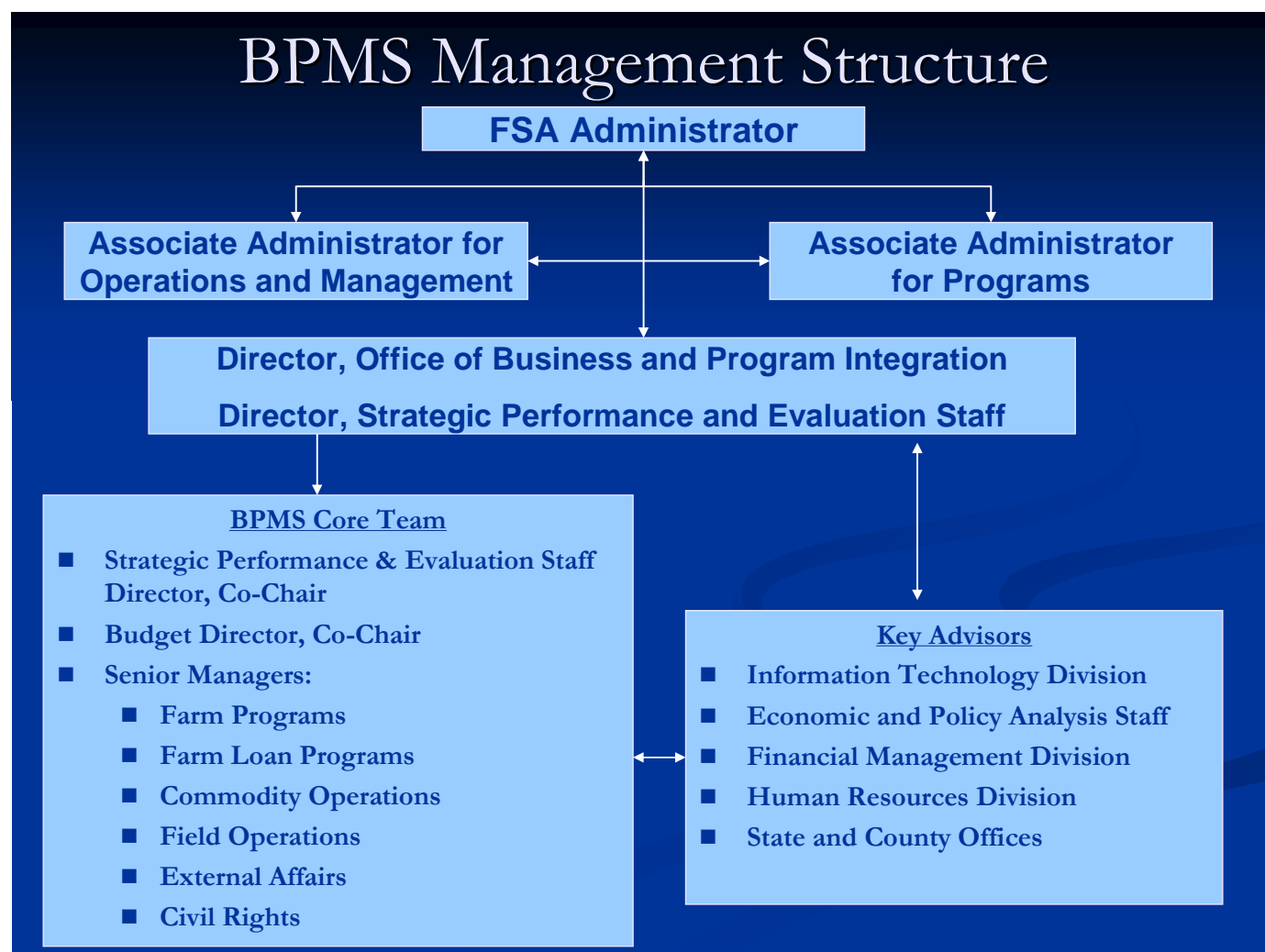


Figure 4. BPMS management structure

FSA began the journey by asking employees (internal stakeholders) and customers and agricultural partners (external stakeholders) to identify and prioritize Agency objectives and to construct organizational strategies to achieve those objectives. With leadership's full support, employees from across the country participated in training



FSA stakeholder meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, , December, 2003

sessions and workshops, and everything was on the table. Every program (see Appendix B) and administrative functional area was reexamined. Because stakeholders had diverse backgrounds and came from various geographic locations, the Agency obtained a wide variety of valuable perspectives.

FSA consulted with more than 200 external stakeholders who played a key role in the Plan's development. This was accomplished through a series of dialogue sessions, which focused on the following questions:

- How can FSA better meet customer needs and improve service?
- What are the mission goals FSA should pursue?
- What strategies should FSA pursue to achieve these goals and measure success?

FSA held meetings in Sacramento, California; Omaha, Nebraska; and Washington, D.C. A number of key issues surfaced during these dialogues in which stakeholders explained which Agency business strategies work well and where improvement is needed. FSA listened and identified nine key areas targeted for improvement:

- Communication:
 - Provide easier electronic access to information on Agency programs through Service Center kiosks and computers.
 - Maintain the "human" customer service option to preserve producers' privacy.
 - Improve training for FSA employees on program eligibility requirements.
 - Expand efforts to educate farmers and aspiring farmers about FSA programs.
 - Boost partnership efforts to inform the public about the need for a healthy, agricultural sector and to attract America's youth to careers in agriculture.
- Streamline business processes to deliver services in a more efficient and timely manner, emphasizing E-Government (E-Gov).
- Improve analysis of FSA program results:
 - Determine the effectiveness of agricultural program outreach.
 - Identify stakeholder needs (e.g., focusing on the stakeholders that should be receiving program benefits as well as those who already receive them).
- Empower FSA Service Center employees and County Committees to adjust program delivery to circumstances to provide improved service to customers.
- Distribute equitably FSA human resources at the local level based on the number of producers receiving services and the types of services required.
- Promote FSA resources and services to attract new and younger entrants into the farming community.



- Partner with State and local organizations, private industry, and other USDA agencies to better leverage resources.
- Improve consistency of program delivery through education of our employees and customers, and
- Improve program design and understanding of and access to programs.

Feedback from stakeholders led to new external vision and mission statements that more accurately reflect stakeholder expectations. The BPMS Core Team listened too, and it learned how to more sharply focus FSA's strategic goals on customer needs.

Through hours of debate, individual perspectives blended together into a more unified, comprehensive view of the Agency and its reason for existence. The field employees explained that because of the relationships that the County Committees and the Service Center employees have with their communities, they contribute much more to their customers' well being than indicated by the dollar value of the benefits disbursed. Further discussions included the role of the farm loan staff in leading producers toward adopting better farming and ranching practices to help them grow and compete while maintaining compliance with environmental regulations and becoming effective stewards of the land.

At the stakeholder meetings and planning workshops, the Core Team explored the role FSA plays in maintaining low food prices by keeping farmers on their land and helping them make their own market choices. The Team also considered guidelines and benchmarks such as those established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Congress, other Federal agencies, and various initiatives within USDA. FSA employees provided background information on the programs, the problems to which these programs respond, and the information required by OMB and Congress for FSA to fulfill its obligations. This approach allowed the Team to focus on certain concerns, such as the issues currently important to national leaders, meeting customer needs and improving performance. These concerns were included in the discussions that led to a Strategic Plan Framework that describes the Agency's current identity, the identity it wants, and the identity rural American expects to see. Once the strategic goals, end outcomes, and performance measures were established, the Core Team made sure that they were validated by employee unions, employee associations, and other interested parties. FSA made every effort to take a participatory approach in developing this Plan.

This Plan is the result of many discussions centered on how best to measure program performance and results. In some instances, the Team discovered the Agency does not have all the tools in place to measure progress toward achieving some strategic goals. In those cases, the Team adjusted the Plan and included measureable activities. The Agency committed to continue improving the measurements as it learns and develops new data collection techniques.



COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The performance pyramid shown in Figure 5 lies at the core of FSA's strategic direction. The performance pyramid shows the alignment and levels of employee responsibility and accountability for successfully achieving the Agency mission, implementing programs, equitable service delivery, and support. The performance of FSA managers is linked to one or more measures in the Plan. Ultimately, all employees' annual performance plans will be linked to the Plan so they can see how they fit in and to what extent they are personally accountable.

As a result of these internal and external reviews, FSA's strategic goals now crosscut traditional program lines and focus on societal outcomes. The first goal – **Supporting Productive Farms and Ranches** – is for FSA's core customer base of American farmers and ranchers. The second goal – **Supporting Secure and Affordable Food and Fiber** – is directed toward consumers and taxpayers at large. The third goal – **Conserving Natural Resources and Enhancing the Environment** – is for all of society and requires commitment from producers as well as State and Federal partners. All the strategic goals are supported by a cross-cutting management scorecard with performance measures that are grouped under the following major categories:

- Enhancing Outreach and Partnership
- Ensuring Civil Rights
- Strategically Managing Human Capital

- Improving Strategic Accountability
- Improving Business Process Effectiveness
- Improving Stakeholder Satisfaction

FSA's three strategic goals represent broad societal outcomes the Agency is striving to achieve; they are high level indicators of the impact on society made by the Agency. The goals are broad and far-reaching. Many factors (and likely many agencies and organizations) will play a role in their achievement. FSA can influence the end-outcomes but many factors will affect their realization and FSA has limited control at the end-outcome level. Recognizing these limits, the Agency remains fully committed to its contributions, which will ultimately affect progress toward these goals. FSA uses the Strategic Plan Framework (Appendix A) to graphically depict alignment and linkages among: strategic goals, end outcomes, intermediate outcomes/objectives, performance measures, and the Agency's products and services. The goals, outcomes, and performance measures in the Framework were the basis for this Plan, and employee performance at all levels of the organization will be tied to the performance measures in the Plan (See Figure 6). The Framework informs FSA employees of their roles and responsibilities, while serving as an external communication vehicle for sharing the intended results of FSA's products and services with its customers and other stakeholders. These strategic goals and performance measures will serve as the foundation for annual performance targets to be integrated with fiscal year performance budget estimates and requests.

FSA has implemented a number of strategies for communicating the contents of its 2005-2010 Strategic Plan. From early on, the Agency tapped all levels of its employees to play an active role in revising the Strategic Plan and creating the strategic goals and performance measures. As the new Strategic Plan began to take shape, the Agency enhanced its internal communication initiatives by engaging staff in all-employee communications, such as electronic newsletters, Administrator memoranda, video, and the BPMS intranet site.

The *Winds of Change*, a videotaped message to all employees from FSA's Administrator, communicated information about the implementation of BPMS and other change initiatives underway at FSA. The video can be viewed by employees on the BPMS intranet site at: <http://bpms.wdc.usda.gov/bpms.htm>. These communication pieces keep everyone informed of the positive changes occurring within the Agency. The Administrator feels very strongly that all employees must be kept abreast of the progress FSA is making toward becoming a result-focused, performance-oriented Agency. FSA assures all employees that the lessons of the past and the technologies of today will shape the direction of the future.



The Agency also developed a public Internet site, <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/bpms>, to improve communication about BPMS with FSA's stakeholders. This site will provide plans, progress reports, and other valuable information. FSA will continually update the public Internet site, adding new material as it becomes available and providing the public with an easily accessible information warehouse.



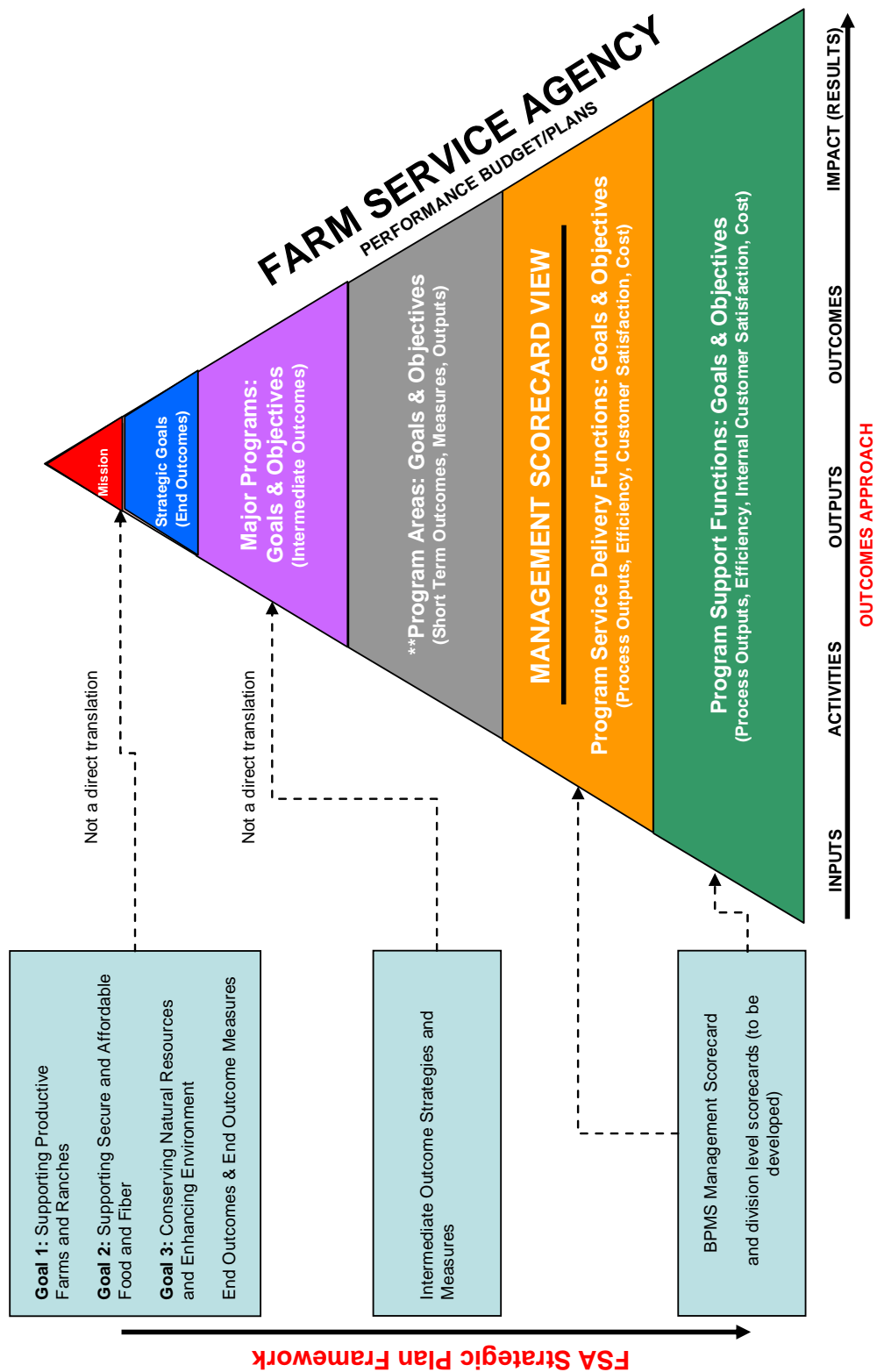


Figure 5. FSA's Strategic Plan Measurement Hierarchy. Pyramid shows how measures at the base roll up to achieve the mission. The levels are crosswalked, by color, to FSA's organizational chart showing level of accountability by organization (see Figure 6 on page 26).

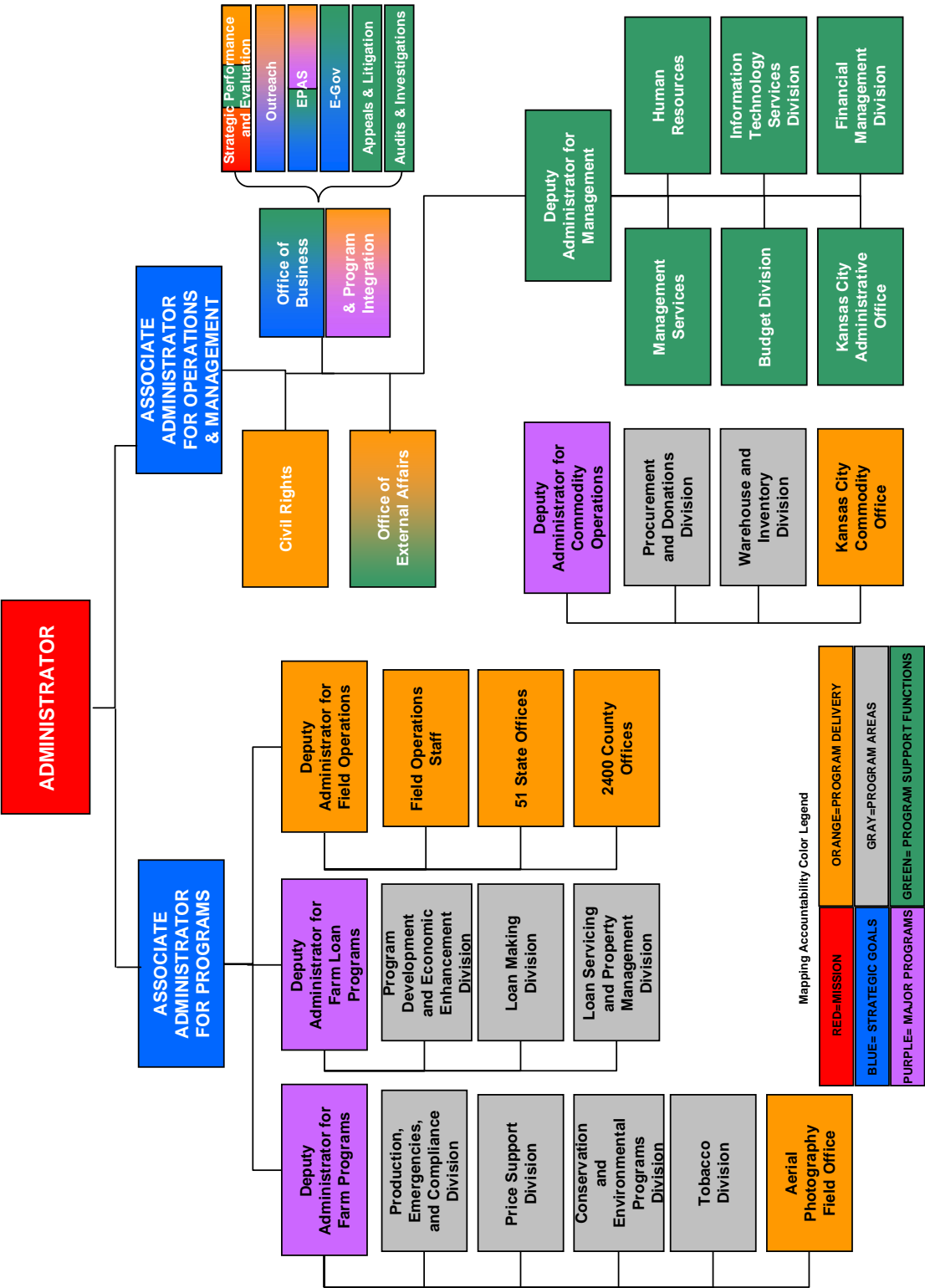


Figure 6. FSA Organizational Chart mapped to area of accountability (see Figure 5). Multiple colors in a block denote multiple areas of accountability.